

LAWNS IN AUTUMN

CARE AFTER DROUGHT

FROM A CORRESPONDENT

Such is the vitality of the grass plant that it has survived the severest trial it has suffered since 1921, and even to renew its growth with vigour. In the past summer the grass in many parks, playing fields, and private gardens where water was scarce gave place to dust, and only in the bottoms and where sprinklers were systematically used was it possible to keep the turf in a verdant condition. Even now, though the sprouting blades show a green mist through the desiccated brown, patches that resembled brown paper a few weeks ago are plentiful enough on lighter land. Dews, showers, and the warmth of the earth all help to regenerate the tired sward, but weeds have as much chance to grow as their host and are making the most of it. Generally, it must be an exceptionally well-tended lawn that will not show signs of the trial for some time.

In the upkeep of lawns routine work evolved from centuries of experience has the major place and usually yields satisfactory results. Mowing, weeding, watering, and composting all have their recognized uses, but of late years, largely through the work of the research staff of the I.C.I., science has done much to benefit farm and garden grasses. It has in particular shown the prime importance of adjusting the grass and its treatment to the soil on which it has to grow. The few inches of loam on which many lawns are laid over the chalk of the Chilterns are not like the softer, richer soil of the Thames valley or the sands of Bagshot. Lawns, again, that are used for games need special handling. Science has shown how fertilizers help the grass plant, and here, again, different grasses may need different fertilizers.

Fertilizers are invaluable to busy amateurs who tend their own gardens and have little leisure for the old-time methods of cultivating a lawn, such as weeding and composting; moreover, in small gardens the compost presents a difficulty, and if one has to buy, one may as well buy a fertilizer. Fertilizers need discreet use, and the natural tendency to overdo them should be resisted. They may eventually cause an excess of acidity that calls for correction by liming, and on lawns on light land a dressing of ground limestone every third year is beneficial. Nitrogen is an important element in the upkeep of grass, and on high and thin soils more is needed than on heavy ground. Sulphate of ammonia lightly broadcast over the grass just now is the most useful source of nitrogen, and mixed with sand, is the chief element in proprietary lawn sands.

Weeds are the curse of lawns, and though there are many mechanical devices for dealing with the grosser kinds, nothing is so efficient for their destruction as hand picking, backbreaking work though it is to all but the young. Aeration is all important for the health of grass, especially on close, heavy land. For that reason the destruction of those busy tunnellers, the worms, is of doubtful advantage, and though their casts make an untidy lawn they are soon brushed over the surface with a besom. Pricking heavy soils with a fork or the tool made for the purpose helps aeration. Those who prefer to smother a lawn temporarily with a dressing of finely sifted leafmould mixed with sand and loam should be making ready; the main preliminary is a raking of the turf which is not pleasing to the eye, but the compost adds organic matter to the soil and fills up the hollow places that follow a prolonged drought, although, if the leafmould and loam is not carefully chosen, the compost brings weeds with it.

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FROM A CORRESPONDENT.

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